

# National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics Advisory Board

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## National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board's – Specialty Crop Committee (SCC) Conference Call Minutes

**Friday, June 15, 2012, 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. Eastern Time.**

**Committee Members Present:** Mike Aerts, Barry Bedwell, Henry Giclas, Rita Green, Charles Hall, Leo Holt, Terril Nell, and Jean-Mari Peltier.

**Committee Members Absent:** Dr. Mary Wagner, Dr. Charles Boyer, Dr. Mark Bender, and Phil Korson.

**NAREEE Board Staff:** Rob Burk (Executive Director).

**Others Present:** None.



### **I. Roll Call of Committee Members**

Rob Burk recorded attendance as the members signed on the conference call.

### **II. Comments and Welcome from the NAREEE Advisory Board Chair.**

Jean- Mari Peltier noted that at the close of the previous meeting of the committee she had discussed several action items including Farm Bill language related to the SCC review of Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) grants. A discussion on the status of the Farm Bill occurred between a number of members including Jean-Mari, Barry Bedwell, and Charles Hall. Henry Giclas offered to reach out to determine the latest status.

Jean-Mari stated that the SCC is a sub-committee of NAREEE. She felt that as part of the SCRI external review, NAREEE reports, and discussions by the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (SCFBA) there is concern over the panel review process. She indicated that the input from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) indicates that the agency is of the opinion that a two panel review process is impossible. She noted that as a member of the wine and grape industry there is a feeling that there has been some success, as well as a lack of success with the current grant programs. She noted that “there seems to be a disconnect.” She noted that she reviewed the SCRI study document distributed by NIFA related to the external review and noticed that there were panels with “zero” industry members. Jean-Mari would like the SCC to

flesh out how to make the review process a “workable” process. Henry Giclas and Charles Hall concurred. Charles Hall noted that the SCFBA tried to develop a workable model. Henry Giclas noted that he shared frustration over the lack of industry involvement. He felt that some projects will not “sync up” with priorities.

Jean-Mari posed a series of related questions and related it to a number of national initiative concepts. Charles Hall felt it would be difficult to initiate a national vegetable research initiative. He noted that there was previously an initiative but it was less developed than some of the programs developed by other commodities. Terril Nell stated that everyone feels the same way on this, and noted two critical issues: 1) they need to make sure that the optics overcome political selection, and 2) view of USDA needs to be overcome if industry shows support. He went on to discuss his previous experience. Jean-Mari asked Terril if he was willing to take a shot at drafting some related language, and he accepted, but he encouraged the group to supply edits. Jean-Mari continued to reference national research initiatives, and national panels with volunteer support. Charles Hall noted that between the nursery, landscaping, and floriculture groups they were able to be involved with the APHIS grant reviews as far as pest management and invasive species. They are able to rank importance, but he was not sure if it was a true panel. Jean-Mari felt that those with interest should have a say. She noted that the grape and wine industry interpreted the enabling statute for SCRI to state that the National Grape and Wine Initiative (NGWI) needed to be formed in order for that industry to participate with SCRI. The NGWI was formed to provide priority advice, and yet they have been ignored which has created frustration. Barry Bedwell indicated that in the case of tree fruit they have coordinated with apples, and pears to come together to help the process. Jean-Mari suggested that they should shift the draft language to clarify how a two step grant review process to improve industry input could be established.

Jean-Mari requested that Rob Burk distribute the USDA NIFA SCRI external review report to the committee via email (during the meeting Rob distributed the link to the report to the SCC).

Jean-Mari requested that Dr. Ann Bartuska be on the line at the conference call to discuss the concept of merit versus competitive.

Jean-Mari noted that she had asked Mike Aerts to review the value and usefulness of ERS, NASS reports to the industry. Mike stated that NASS has informed external stakeholder groups that it can collect data if a particular new report is funded by the requesters. He also noted that AMS has quite a bit of information in circulation. He noted that AMS indicates that if there is an opportunity to educate, they are willing to reach out. Mike noted some discrepancies on specialty crop data, with some sector data missing at border crossings, and whole sale markets. He stated that there is also lots of data being unused. He felt that connecting those gaps would help the industry. Jean-Mari questioned whether AMS should provide the SCC with a report on their activities. She also noted that REE has the ability, through extension, to get the word out, though some in the industry may view much of that data as proprietary. The group was generally agreeable with the idea of including AMS. Mike stated that he could work to bring in AMS representatives for a future SCC conference call and/or field hearing.

Jean-Mari questioned the group on whether they thought that the SCC annual report should include the recommendations of the SCFBA, and/or blend in the SCRI external review. Charles Hall indicated that they should do a combination of both. He noted that they were all “pretty much” on the same page.

Jean-Mari suggested that if you look at the statute related to SCRI point #1 is a whole bunch of points that are sub-points to breeding genetics and genomics. All of which are important for specialty crops. At the least it needs to say plant “genetic/genomics” and “other non-genetic genomic processes.” She noted that the point, otherwise, is strange and has nothing to do with plant breeding.

Jean-Mari questioned whether there was a chance on the House side as none of the suggested changes were accepted on the Senate side. Barry Bedwell noted that some efficiency and focus changes, with no cost, were feasible. Jean-Mari felt that the SCC should get “this” out before the potential impact on legislation is lost.

Jean-Mari felt that a message to the Secretary was necessary about dedicating resources to specialty crops. She also stated that the SCC should take a look at whether Agricultural Food Research Initiative (AFRI) funds should go to SCRI. Through NAREEE advice to Congress should also noted that some REE funds should go to specialty crops. Terril Nell noted that he had a hard time seeing how specialty crops fit into USDA priorities. Jean-Mari stated that she would take a shot at compiling some data on how much interest there is in Specialty Crop research investment. She plans to utilize some reports from J. Alston. She felt that Specialty Crops need a stop gap for the current year. Barry Bedwell stressed that they need to be pragmatic, and that they needed champions on this matter.

Jean-Mari suggested a number of conference call dates including June 28<sup>th</sup>, or 29<sup>th</sup>. She questioned if there was a preference for Friday committee meetings, and the group voiced that it was generally acceptable. The committee did not commit to one specific date for the next conference call.

The meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

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TBD  
Chair

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Rob Burk  
Executive Director

APPROVAL BY COMMITTEE:

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Date

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Initials  
Chair

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Initials  
Executive Director